

## Expo opens in Moultrie

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MOULTRIE — Farmers and Americans who make goods are “the people who will lead the way in the resurgence,” Gov. Sonny Perdue said, welcoming hundreds of farmers and 10 Southeastern states to the 2008 Sunbelt Expo.

“It’s been uncertain times but farmers are used to uncertain times,” Perdue said. “Financial markets, credit markets, and banks are in turmoil, but agriculture is still a bright spot in our U.S. economy.”

From a balance of trade standpoint, agriculture is also bright spot, said U.S. Sen. Saxby Chambliss, a Republican from Moultrie, home of the 31st annual Expo.

Each year, an estimated 100,000 visitors attend the Expo, where about 1,200 exhibitors will showcase the latest in agriculture technology through Thursday on 700 acres at Moultrie’s Spence Field.

“If you eat it, wear it or smoke it, chances are it’s going to come from my home county,” Chambliss said, before introducing Mark Keenum, U.S. undersecretary of agriculture for Farm and Foreign Agriculture.

Keenum said that American income from farming was at record levels, with \$313 billion in cash income from agriculture, \$96 billion in net farm income and \$101 billion in net cash income for 2008.

“Overall, the balance sheet for American agriculture is extremely strong,” Keenum said.

Among the 10 contestants for Southeastern Farmer of the Year named Tuesday was a first woman, Kentucky Farmer of the Year Loretta Lyons.

Kentucky was the state spotlighted at the Expo this year, and Kentucky Executive Director of the Governor’s Office of Agriculture Policy Roger Thomas described his state’s ability to diversify crops since the late 1990s using tobacco settlement funds.

“In this, the year of the woman, or almost, with Gov. Palin, and almost Sen. Clinton being on the Democratic ticket, don’t you think it’s appropriate that this should be the first year that one of the finalists should be a woman?” Thomas said.

Named Southeastern Farmer of the Year was Brian Kirksey, who raises horticultural shrubs, pine trees, grasses, fruit trees and beef cattle on 305 acres in Amity, Ark.

Among the Expo’s hundreds of exhibitors was a biomass gasification unit, which can turn 50 pounds of wood per hour into electricity, said Christian Brodbeck of Auburn University’s Natural Resources Development Institute.

“We’re one of the few people around doing this type of research,” he said.

The institute also is developing technologies for converting feed stocks,

poultry waste and even pecan hulls into energy.

"The next market for a system like this is to use waste products to offset electrical costs," Brodbeck said.

Despite rising fuel costs, farmers can save time and money by comparison shopping at the Expo, Executive Director Chip Blalock said.

"In one day, visitors can evaluate models and brands that might not be readily available in their area, through state-of-the-art field machinery demonstrations," he said, "as well as view cutting-edge research practices and interactive educational exhibits."

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